

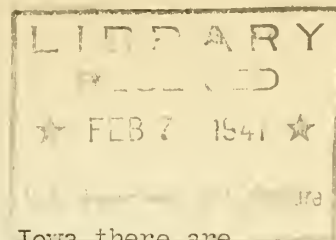
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## GRANGER HOMESTEADS, IOWA



In the heart of the coal mining area of central Iowa there are seven coal mines within a radius of seven miles of the little town of Granger. Coal mining is the principal industry in this area; but because it is characterized by seasonal employment it has caused pressing social and economic problems among the men who work in the mines. Their work usually slacks off in April and does not pick up again until September, and as a result, their cash income usually is too low to maintain a decent standard of living.

Many of these workers formerly lived in mining camps located near their work. The houses were owned by the coal operators, and the rent was deducted from the miners' wages. These houses were usually of cheap construction and inadequate size, resulting in an overcrowded and insanitary situation. Many of the families were in poor health, and they had few cultural and educational facilities.

### Origin of the Project

When the Division of Subsistence Homesteads was set up in the Interior Department in 1933 to help low-income industrial workers improve their housing and living conditions, some of the citizens of Granger urged the agency to establish a project near that town for benefit of the mine workers. Leading this movement was a sponsoring committee headed by Father Ligutti of the Catholic parochial school nearby. The other members of the sponsoring group were Mr. W. Flack, banker; Dr. Charming G. Smith; Mr. Sidney A. Johnson, attorney; and Mr. Mark Furman, merchant. These men were in daily contact with social and economic ills existing in the mining camps, and for some time had been seeking a remedy for the problem. Believing that the Subsistence Homesteads program would furnish a solution, they gathered the necessary data, submitted the applications, got the endorsements of educational, agricultural, and labor leaders, as well as those of Iowa legislative bodies, and were successful in having a project located at Granger.

The Subsistence Homesteads Division approved the project in March, 1934, and purchased 224 acres of land one mile northwest of the town of Granger. In May, 1935, this and similar projects started by Subsistence Homesteads were transferred to the Resettlement Administration, which was succeeded in 1937 by the Farm Security Administration.

Granger Homesteads was constructed to provide 50 miners and their families with modern homes at low cost, together with land on which they could raise most of their own food. Subsistence gardens and part-time farming fitted logically into the economic plan for the project, since the men had little work in the mines during the cropping season.

Three architectural plans were used in building the four, five, and six-room frame houses, which were completed by December, 1935. The five



and six-room houses have two stories; all have full basements and brick foundations. Inside walls are of plywood and the ceilings are of celotex. Equipment includes modern plumbing, ample closets, hot air furnaces, and hot water heaters. Choice between gas, coal, or electric cooking facilities is provided.

An individual well was drilled near each house. An electric pump sunk in a cement pit and operated automatically furnishes the water for the pressure tank in each house. Sewage disposal is by individual septic tanks. Twelve of the units have small barns and 38 of them have a combination garage and chicken coop.

Electricity is provided through the power lines of a private utility, and telephone service is available to individual subscribers. A system of county roads connects the homesites with each other and with nearby highways. There are  $13\frac{1}{4}$  acres of land devoted to roads and parks. Each homestead has an average of more than 4 acres of ground, most of which is in cultivation. The soil varies from fine sandy loam to silty clay, is gently rolling, well drained, and is adaptable to all truck crops.

#### Project Costs

The average cost of the houses, including labor and materials, amounted to \$2,232, or \$2,280 including planning and inspection. Average unit cost, including outbuildings, house, land, and utilities, was \$4,097. The total project cost was \$207,901. The units rent for from \$13.96 to \$18.50 per month, the average being \$15.73. At the present time plans are being worked out whereby the homesteaders may buy the homes.

One lot was set aside for a community house, which has become one of the most popular buildings on the project. Hardly a day passes but what it is used as a meeting place by various groups and the people take unusual pride in keeping it in good order. The community house also has working space and facilities for the canning of fruits and vegetables raised by the homesteaders.

Project children attend the Granger Public School and a Catholic parochial school, both of which are less than a mile from the project site; and there are three churches in the town of Granger. A library is sponsored by the women's club of the project.

#### Homestead Residents

The sponsoring committee was responsible in a large measure for the selection of the occupants of Granger Homesteads. Father Ligutti in particular, as the parish priest and head of the parochial school, which many of the children attend, knows each family's background, their



attitudes and aspirations, their virtues and their shortcomings. He preaches to them on Sundays, lectures to them on cooperative or agricultural subjects at nights, attends their committee meetings in an advisory capacity, and visits their homes. He and the community manager cooperate closely.

The homesteaders selected represent the type which the sponsors had in mind when the project was planned. Families with several children predominate, and a majority of the men are employed in the coal mines. They represent a cross section of the community from which they were drawn. Eighteen are Italian extraction, eight are Croatian, others are of mixed nationality, with a few of native American stock. More than half of them are native-born and all are American citizens. About two-thirds are Catholic and one-third Protestant.

### A New Standard of Living

#### Crops

In their new homes at Granger Homesteads, these families are enjoying a better diet and are reducing their living costs by home production of food. Home management and gardening plans are made by each family with Farm Security Administration assistance. They have available not only the scientific and technical advice from one of the best agricultural schools in the country, Iowa State College, located less than thirty miles away, but also the practical suggestions of a community manager with a long background of farm experience. In spite of a severe drought, during the first year (1936) the families were able, through subsistence gardening, to increase their annual incomes by \$69 per household.

The following year plans were made for orchards, berry patches, and landscaping. Fruit trees, vines and plants were also set out. That summer farm and garden crops were abundant and large quantities of vegetables were canned and stored, in addition to the fresh vegetables consumed during the growing season. There were also alfalfa, corn, grain and root crops for feeding subsistence livestock; and the amount of livestock increased substantially.

Again in 1938 the homesteaders were assisted in planning their crops and gardens, and excellent gardens were grown. There was an abundance of all kinds of garden products which could be grown in that area. There was also good production of feed crops for subsistence livestock, and several homesteaders produced surplus hogs for sale.

The increase in livestock production was especially significant. It meant a better diet and lower-cost meat budget for many families. Ample quantities of milk, poultry, and eggs were also available to most of the families. Comparing the 1938 season with the pre-homestead year, there







were increases as follows: Cattle, -44 percent; hogs, 555 percent; poultry, 30 percent; other animals, 240 percent; gallons of milk produced, 25 percent; eggs produced, 10 percent; home-produced meat, 235 percent; quarts of fruits and vegetables canned, 59 percent; roots and tubers stored, 770 percent.

### Education

Education for both children and adults has been emphasized at Granger Homesteads. This need arose from the fact that the homestead population is composed largely of miners whose experience and training has been almost entirely in that occupation. Very few had gone further than grade school and some had not attended school at all. Local sponsors and the community manager arranged a series of study group meetings, and discussion group leaders were obtained from the educational division of WPA in Des Moines.

The homesteaders who enrolled were divided into four groups, each of which met weekly with a leader in charge. The meetings also offered the community manager an opportunity to meet with a large number of the homesteaders regularly. Time was allotted him to discuss acreage and production plans. This was supplemented with individual interviews later with practically every one of the homesteaders. Topics studied in weekly meetings include soil management, subsistence livestock management, and fruit and vegetable production, with leaders coming from the Extension Service and various college staffs. Members of the groups were encouraged to participate in the discussions as much as possible.

One result of the meetings to discuss mutual needs and problems was the formation of a credit union, which has played an important part at Granger Homesteads. This organization has enabled many of the homesteaders to buy cows, hogs, feed, and even to pay hospital bills. It also financed the purchase of some canning equipment for the cooperative association.

Another topic studied at the meetings was the fundamentals of cooperative buying, selling, and service. This has resulted in the formation of a community cooperative association, which has stimulated much of the agricultural production beyond actual subsistence needs. The association has been guided by the experience of the community manager, the advice of Father Ligutti, who has made an extensive study of cooperatives in other countries, and the technical help of experts at Iowa State College.

During its first year of operation the association made progress in the cooperative buying of seed, nursery stock, fertilizer, and feed. Later the members pooled their surpluses of tomatoes and corn, the women set up their pressure cookers in a vacant house, and divided their work days so that all who wished might have a part in the canning operations. The resulting product was graded as "Extra-Fancy" and found a ready



market in Des Moines at a premium over standard brands. When the goods were all sold the cooperative was able to pay its members market price for the produce furnished and the women received fifteen cents an hour for their services. Still later, the members each got small individual FSA loans and amassed a capital of nearly a thousand dollars, most of which was used to purchase the complete canning equipment from a defunct plant in northern Iowa. The cooperative also owns a complete line of good farming equipment which is furnished to the members at a cost just sufficient to cover its amortization and depreciation.

It is realized that the present canning operations of the cooperative lie in a highly competitive field, in which success can be attained only by the production of a superior product, or specialization in something less competitive than tomatoes and corn. Efforts are being made to find and develop such a product. The completion of the modern community building with a full basement in which the canning operations are conducted has given a new enthusiasm to the members and a new impetus to the cooperative movement.

### Social and Community Progress

Social activities are largely centered around schools, churches and the community building. The women on the project formed a club, one activity of which has been to furnish the community building. Common interests have been established in social, recreational and economic functions, which were more or less absent before the families came on the project.

A general meeting of all homesteaders is held each month, at which educational and business phases of the community plans and problems are discussed. From time to time pot-luck suppers, card parties, and other programs are arranged for these meetings.

The cooperative association has standing committees on adult education; young people's work; cooperative purchasing; cooperative marketing; agricultural development; federal, state, and county relationships; homestead welfare, and social and recreational development; also special committees on fire prevention, roads and homestead clean-up.

Two good examples of successful cooperation are (1) a Homesteaders' Fair in which practically every family participated in the exhibits and program, and (2) the cooperative purchase of a tractor and farm equipment.

### Planning for the Future

The success thus far attained by the families at Granger Homesteads in improving their living standards has been due in no small degree to two facts which they are learning. One fact is that since their income from mining is inadequate, it is necessary for them to develop other sources of income, such as subsistence gardening and part-time farming, even though this may not give as high returns in cash as they receive when they can get work in the mines. The other fact the homesteaders are learning is the importance of living within their income—not to



spend all they earn during a period of good wages, but to save some of their earnings for the slack season when they are laid off.

There yet remains at Granger Homesteads the economic problem of a gradually decreasing mine income. Production and employment in the bituminous mines has been slowly diminishing. As this source of income lessens, other income opportunities must be expanded or developed. The gains already made through subsistence farming would not be sufficient to offset the loss in industrial income should mining continue to decline.

There are several possible lines along which new income might be developed, but all of them involve undertakings beyond the scope of the present program. A new source of industrial income supplanting that of the mines, such as the location of a rural industry in the area, offers one possible solution, but there is no present likelihood of such a development. Another course would be the expansion of the agricultural development, gradually transferring the people unable to get sufficient work in the mines to full-time farming, and taking advantage of cooperative methods as far as practical. A third solution might be a rural works program, through which available labor could be employed on needed projects to rebuild and protect the land resources of the area and increase its capacity to give them permanent support.

The possible solutions to this problem are being studied by all who are connected with the project.

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